

Little Earth of United Tribes Design Project



University of Minnesota Landscape Architecture

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Project Initiation

In the late 1960's, a multi-unit housing complex, originally known as South High, was developed in south Minneapolis on land straddling Cedar Avenue at 25th Street South. From its origins, the complex has been inhabited largely by Native Americans of the Ojibewa and Dakota tribes. The complex's name became associated with the Native American organization managing the complex during the 1970's, Little Earth of United Tribes. Known today by its short title, Little Earth, a complex of 166 townhouse units and three apartment buildings, is currently managed by the Westminister Corporation, a community development affiliate of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. The Little Earth Resident's Association provides input to the Westminister Corporation on matters related to community needs and interests.

In September 1988 the Little Earth Residents Association contacted the University of Minnesota's Center for Community Studies (CCS) seeking assistance in designing private spaces for Little Earth families and community play spaces for youth. The Association was also seeking site design options that would improve security throughout the Little Earth community.

Upon receipt of the Little Earth application, CCS Administrator Peggy Sand contacted David Pitt and Robert Sykes, professors in the University of Minnesota Department of Landscape Architecture, about the possibility of using Little Earth as a class project for the landscape architecture studio they teach during the fall quarter. This class involves students in their fourth year of a five year Bachelor of Landscape Architecture degree program, and graduate students earning a Master of Landscape Architecture degree. The studio focuses on the design of dwelling places. Because the Little Earth project would enable the class to study issues of privacy and community in a multi-family housing complex while simultaneously providing assistance to interested residents, Professors Pitt and Sykes selected Little Earth as the site of a studio project.

Project Scope and Purpose

This project looks at ways to make the outdoor spaces at Little Earth more useful for the residents. Such an effort benefits project participants in several ways. First, the University students gain valuable insights learning from a "real world" situation. Second, the ideas developed by the students will aid residents and managers of Little Earth in seeing a range of options for site improvements. And third, this project hopefully will initiate a process of community involvement in the ongoing Little Earth improvement planning process.

Student projects are not produced as blueprints for construction. Rather it is hoped they will offer some creative ideas that otherwise might not have been considered.

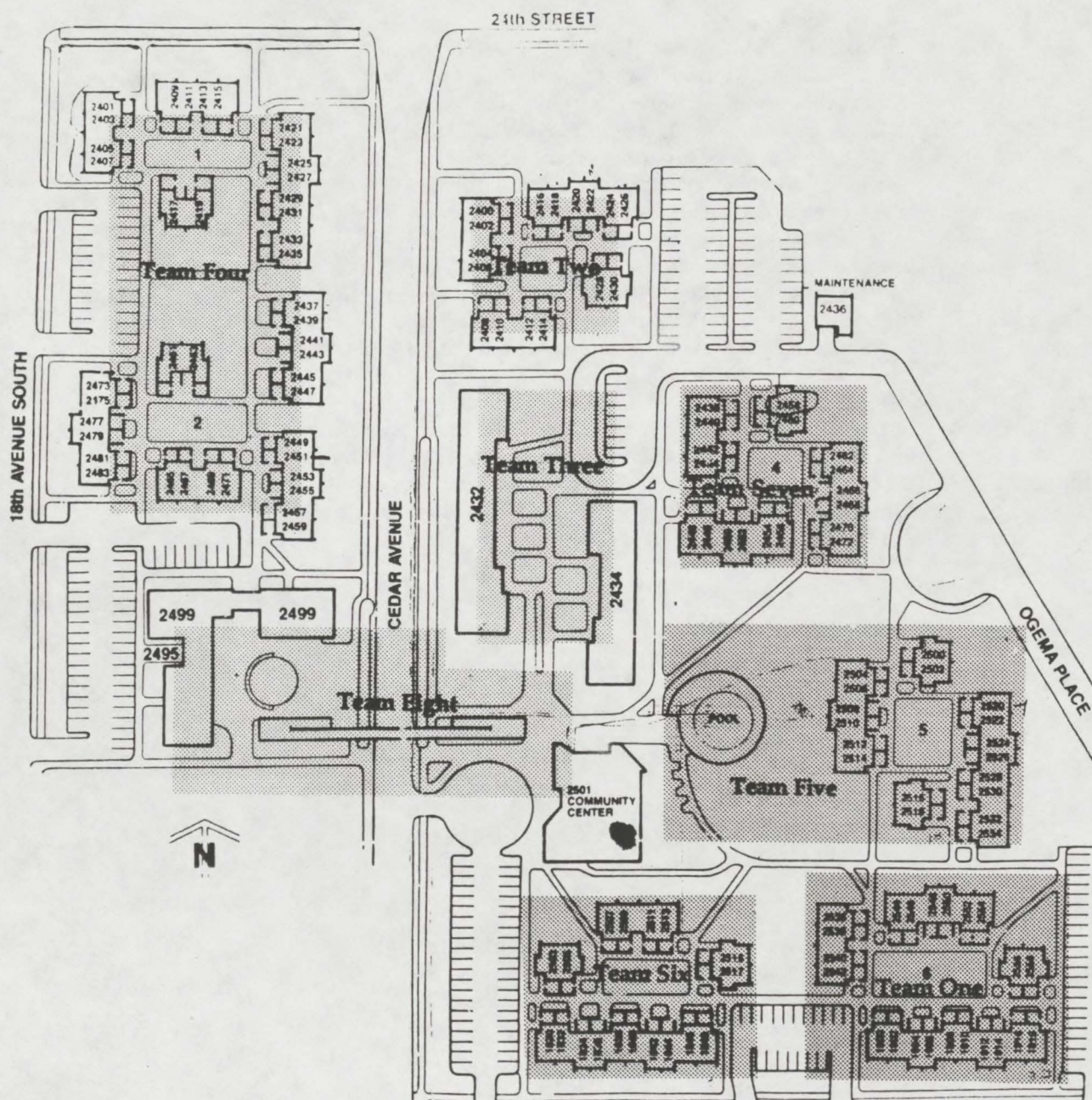
Project Participants

Twenty-four Landscape Architecture students participated in the Little Earth project. They worked in the following teams each studying and making proposals for a particular portion of Little Earth.

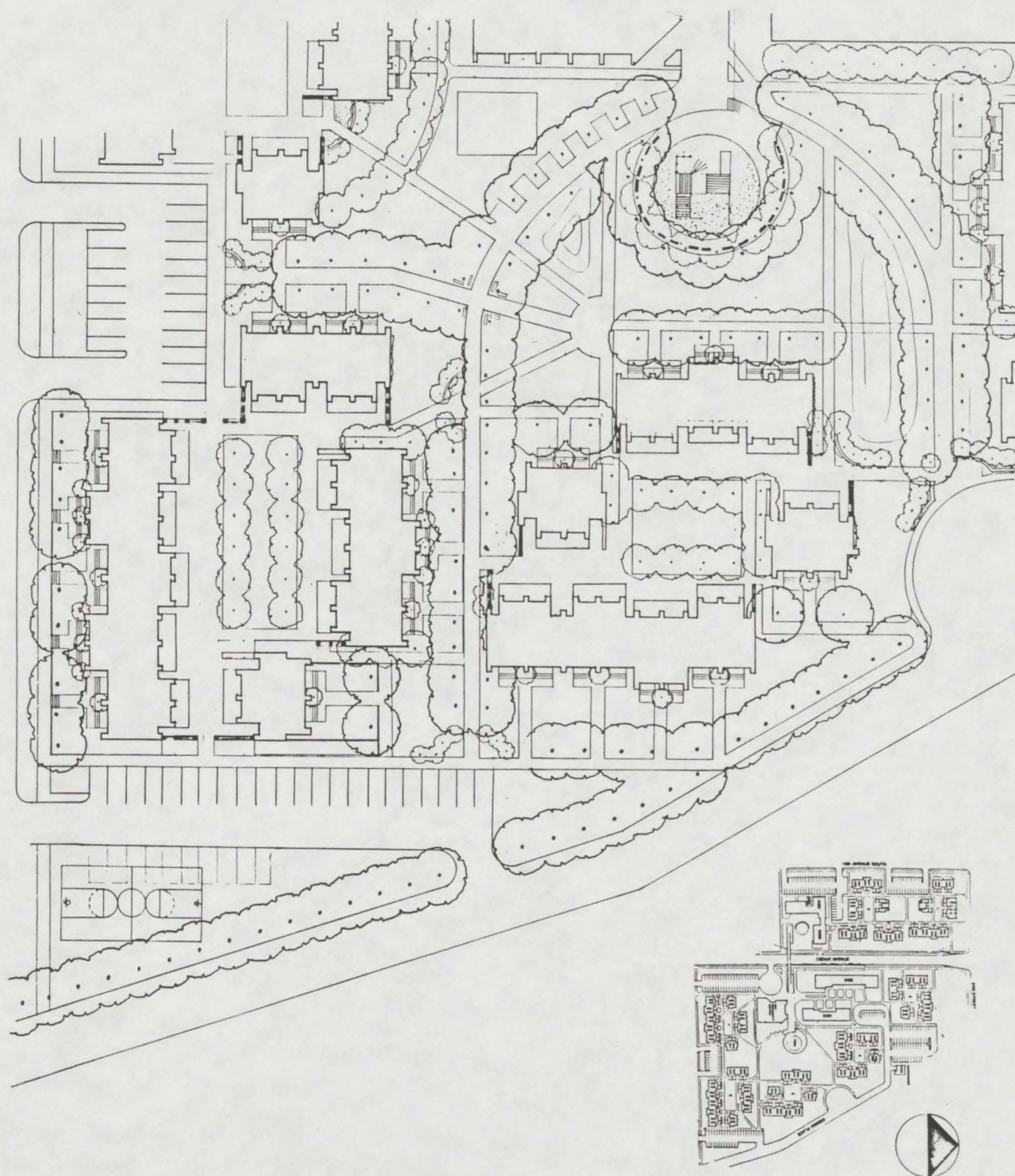
- Team 1. Nancy Benjamin / Gina Bonsignore / Betsy Fitzsimmons
- Team 2. Frank Fitzgerald / Chuck Stifter / Jeff Zimmerman
- Team 3. Dave Lonetti / Cathy Skalicky / Martha Smart
- Team 4. Lance Anderson / Jeff Buboltz / Tom Kerby
- Team 5. Barbara Burgum / Kong Mei / Trina Wicklatz
- Team 6. Kyle Brown / Jean Garbarini / Tom Ritzer
- Team 7. Ross Fairbrother / Jeff McDonell / Jeff Timm
- Team 8. Paul Damon / Mike Horner / Dan Nadenicek

Six of the teams focused on different townhouse clusters and their adjacent community spaces. One of the teams produced a design for the community spaces near the two apartment buildings. The eighth team looked at the connection between the east and west sides of Cedar Avenue. Each team produced designs to address the four major issues of the project within their assigned areas of the Little Earth community.

Master plans showing design proposals for the areas of Little Earth studied by each team are presented in pages 5 through 12. The design proposals are referenced to a map of the entire Little Earth community presented on page 4. The remainder of this booklet discusses alternative proposals, as presented in these eight master plans, for resolving each of the four major design issues facing improvement of the Little Earth community.



Reference Map of the Little Earth Community. Shaded portions indicate areas studied by each design team.

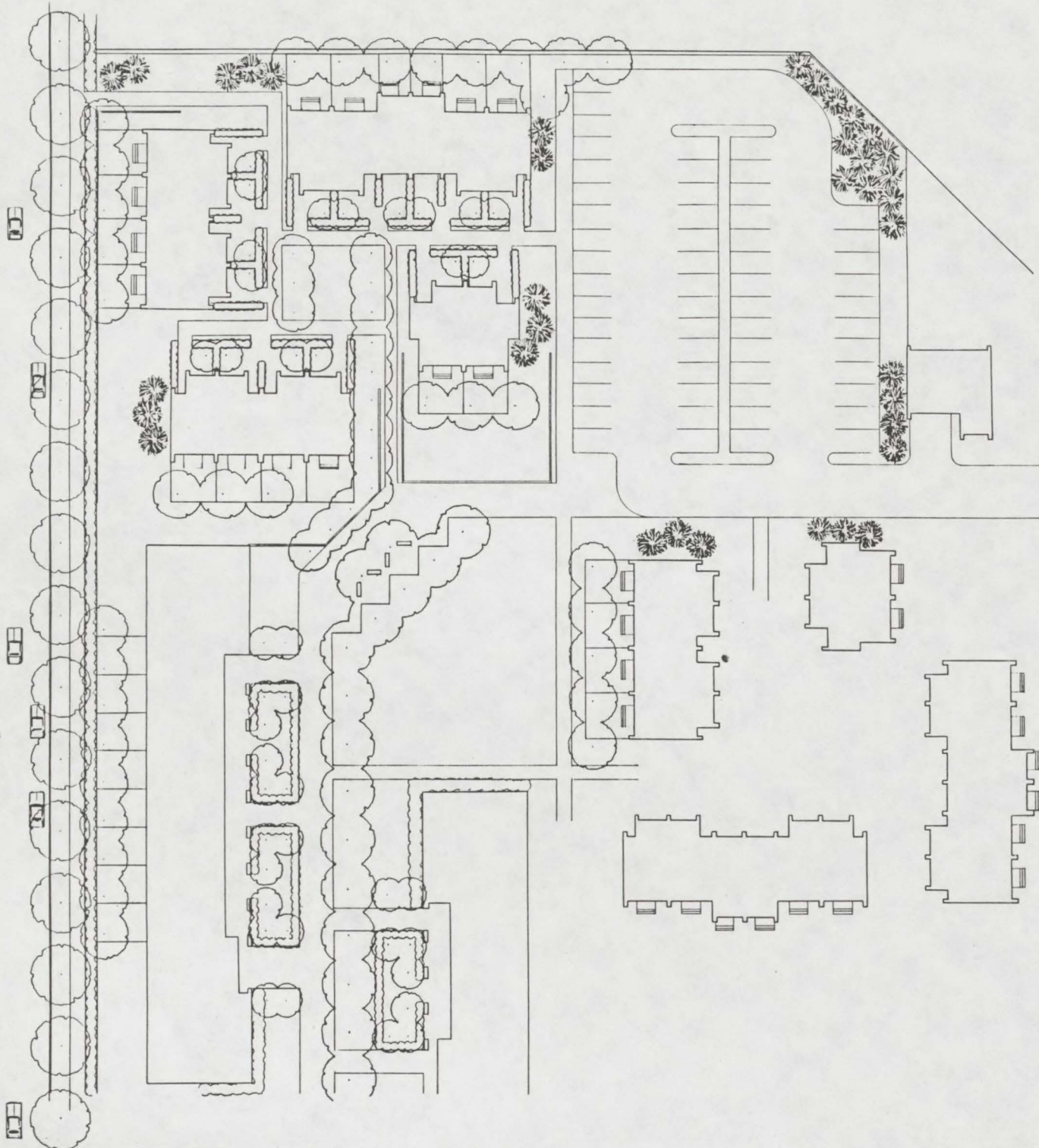


Cooperative Design Team
N. Benjamin ~ R. Bonsignore ~ E. Fitzsimons

University of Minnesota - Landscape Architecture
LA 3091: The Landscape of Dwelling ~ December 2, 1988

MASTER PLAN
Scale 1"=20'

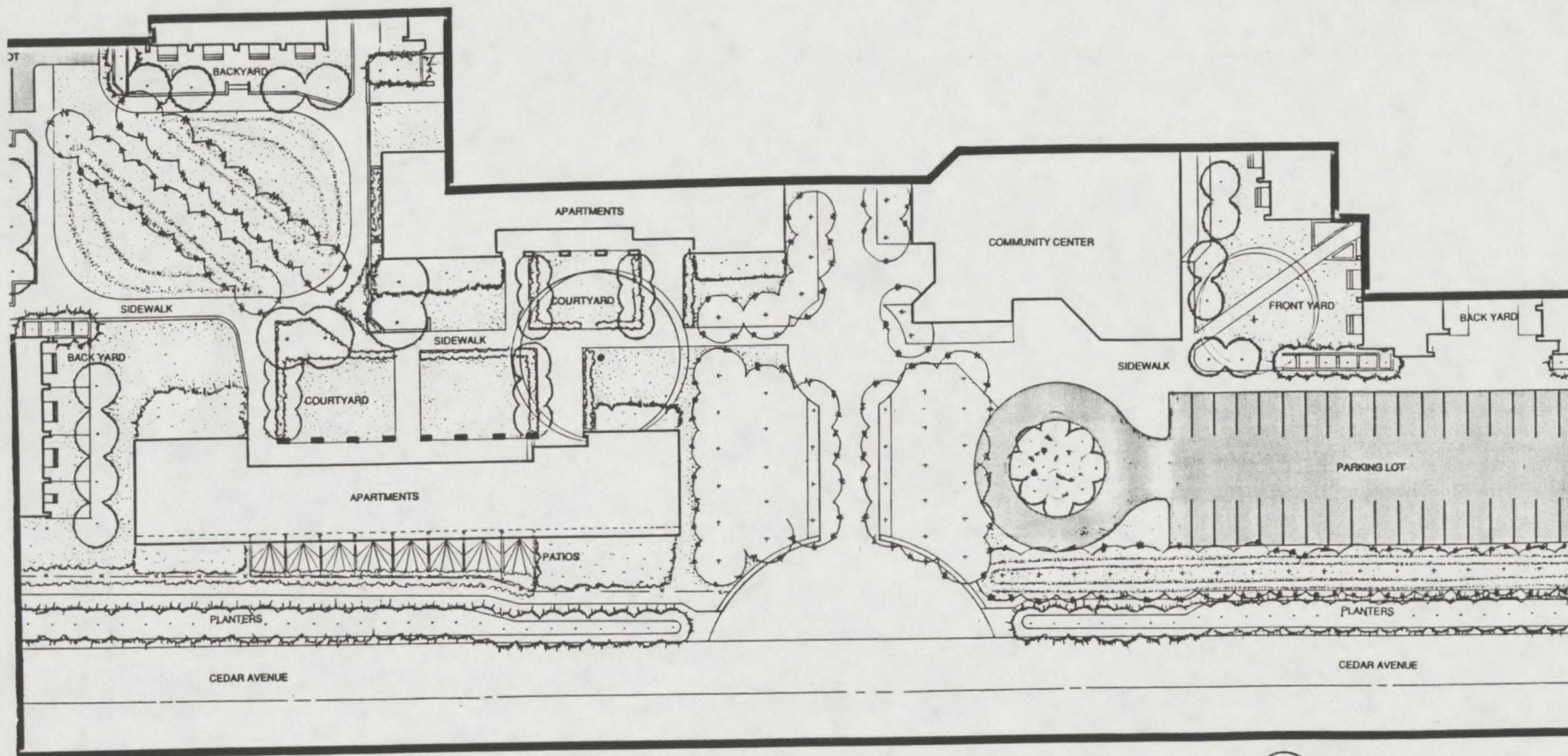
**Little Earth of
United Tribes Inc.**



MASTER PLAN
SCALE 1" = 20' - 0"

LITTLE EARTH OF UNITED TRIBES
MINNEAPOLIS MINNESOTA

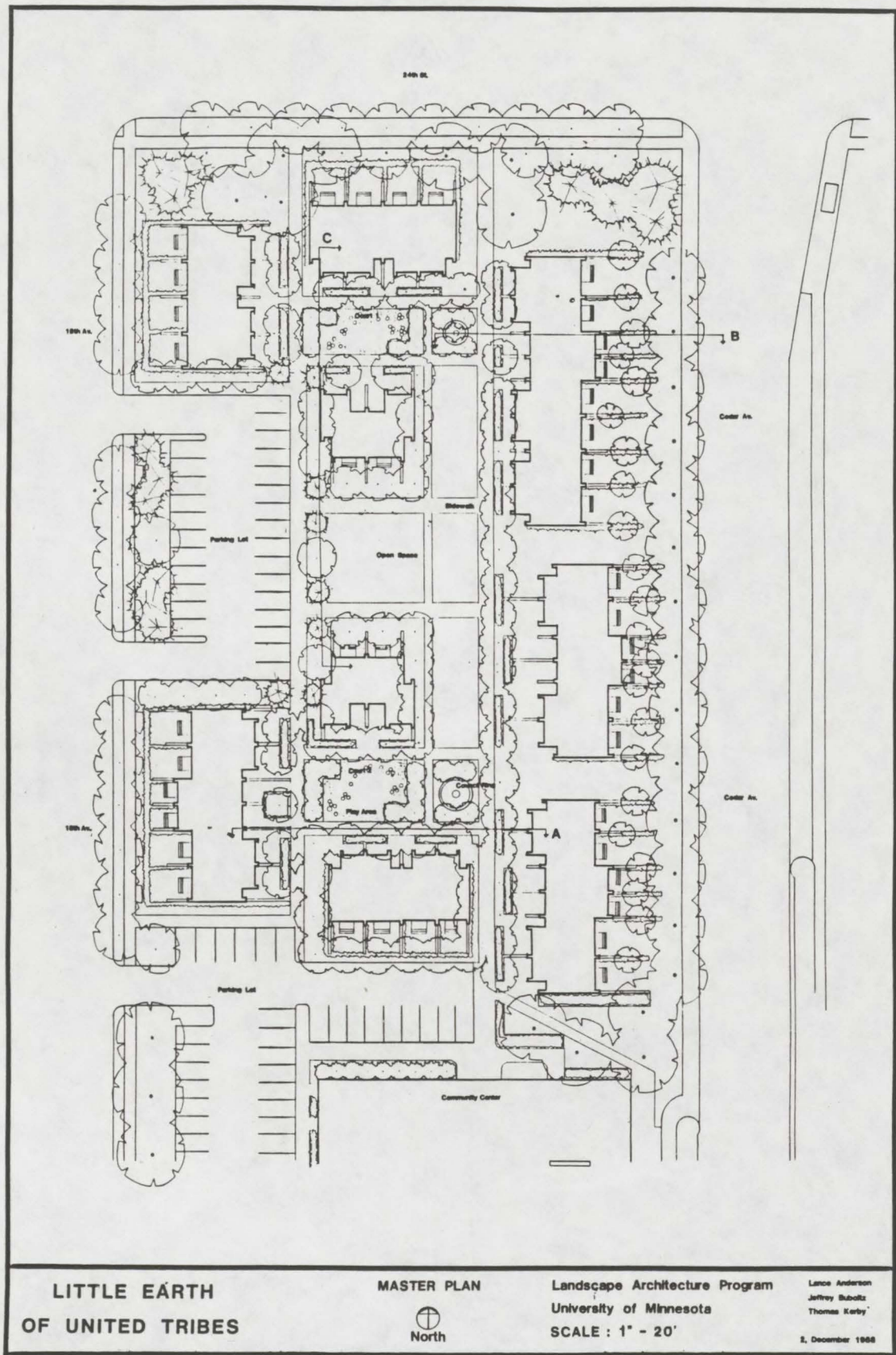
FITZGERALD, STIFTER, ZIMMERMAN
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS
DECEMBER 1988

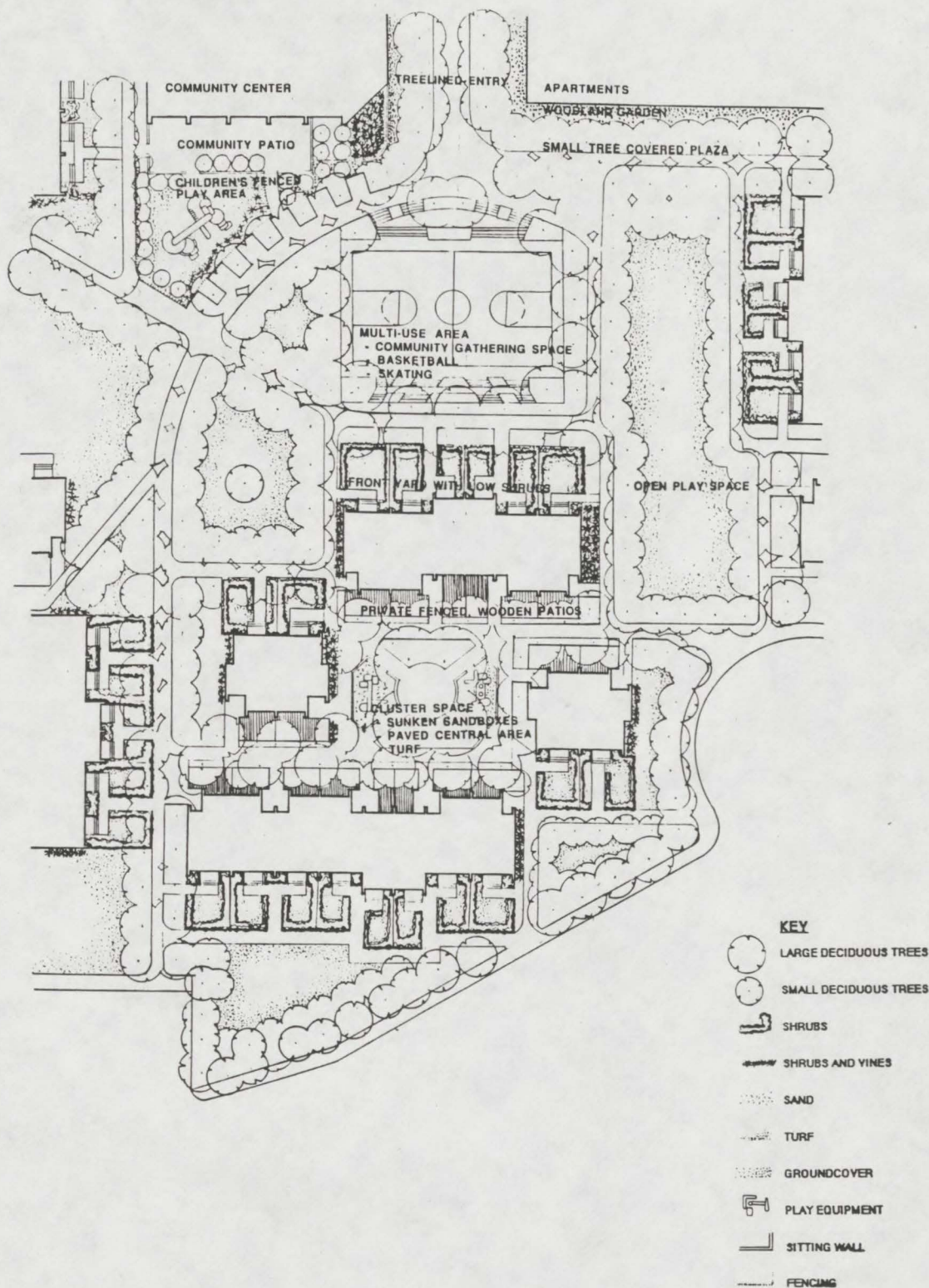


SCALE 1" = 20'

MASTER PLAN
LITTLE EARTH OF UNITED TRIBES
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

LONETTI, SKALICKY & SMART
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE PROGRAM
DESIGN 3091, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
DECEMBER 2, 1988





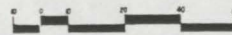
LITTLE EARTH HOUSING
2501 CEDAR AVE.
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

CLUSTER 5 & COMMUNITY AREA

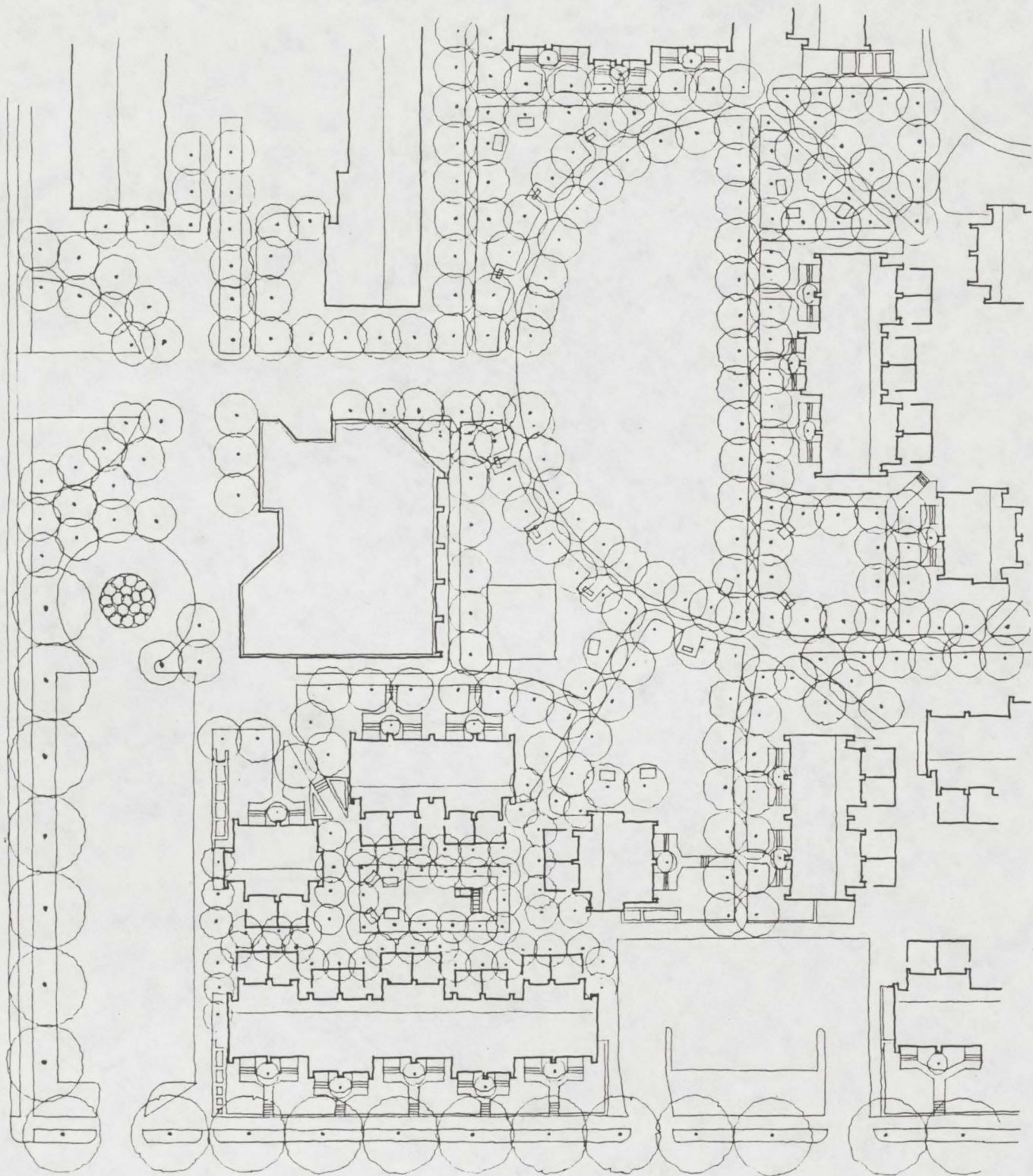


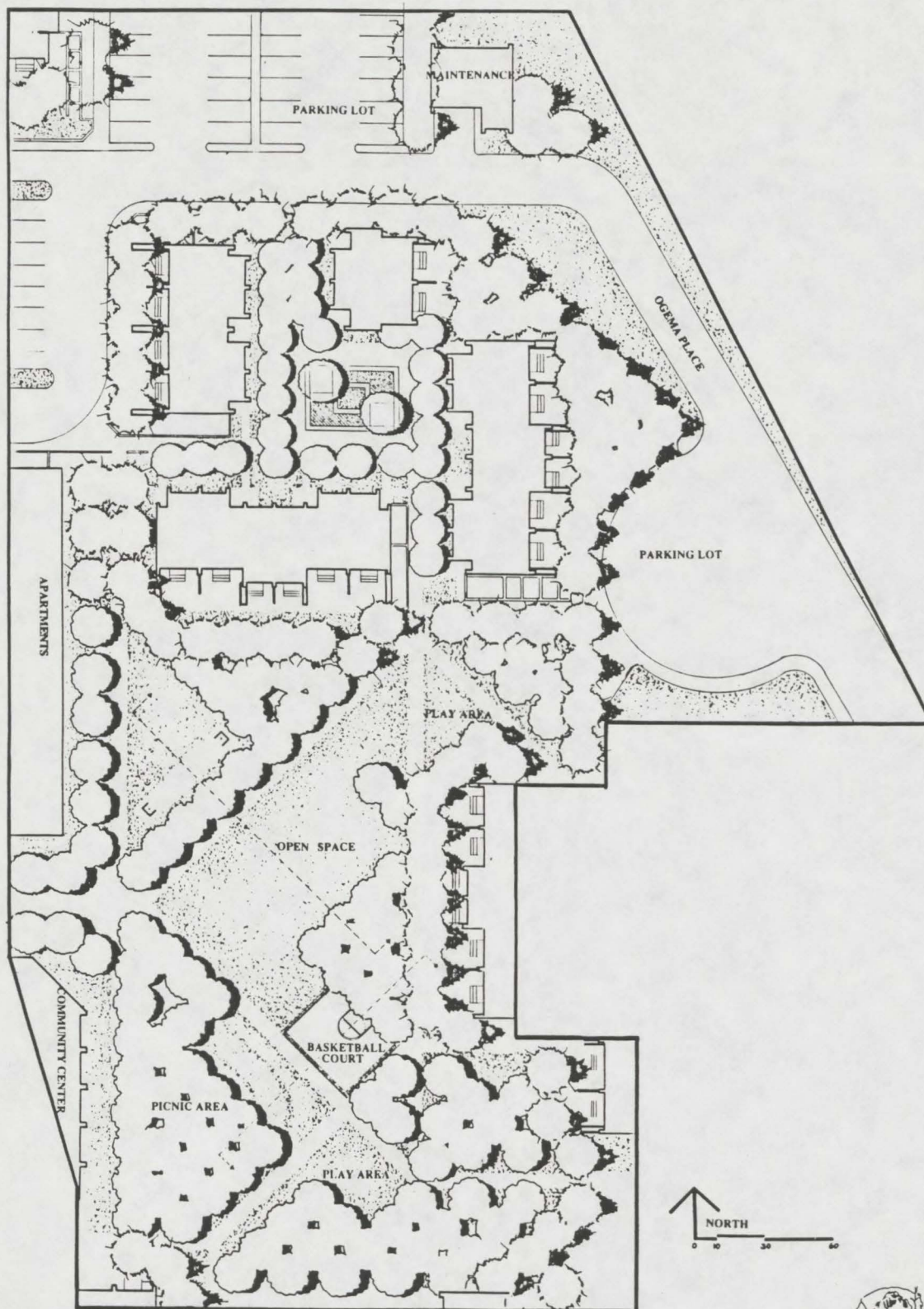
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

DECEMBER 2, 1988



BARBARA BURGUM
KONG MEI
TRINA WICKLATZ





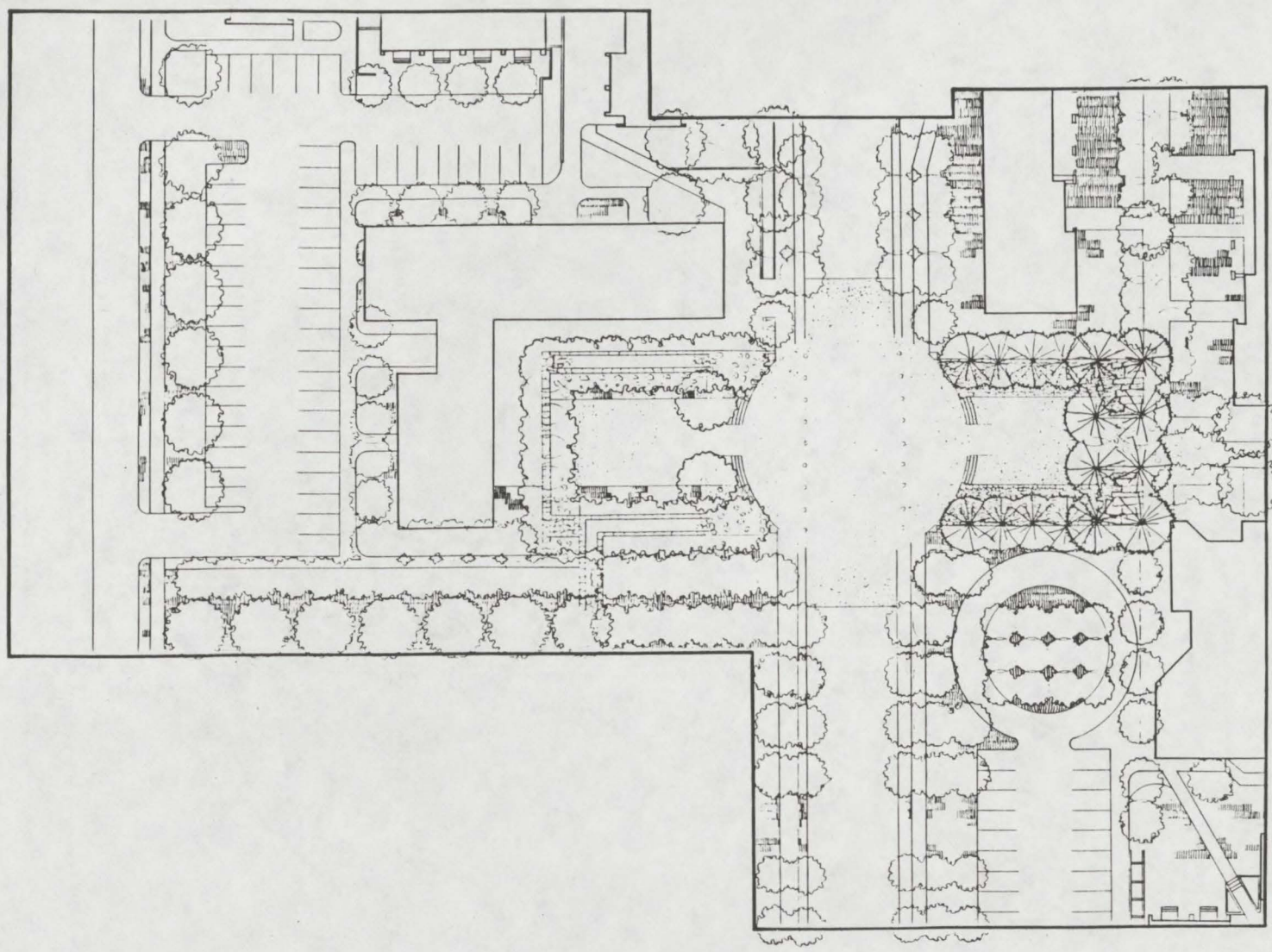
LITTLE EARTH OF UNITED TRIBES

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DATE 12-2-88

MASTER PLAN

ROSS FAIRBROTHER
JEFF McDONELL
JEFF TIMM











NADENICEK
DAMON
HORNER
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS
ST. PAUL, MN



SCALE 1" = 30'



LEGEND

-  GRANITE PAVING
-  EXPOSED AGGREGATE
-  WATER FEATURE
-  EVERGREEN TREES
-  SEATING WALL
-  STONEWORK

LITTLE
EARTH
OF
UNITED
TRIBES

MINNEAPOLIS, MN

MASTER PLAN

Unit Entries and the Relationship of Front Yard to Backyard

Early visits to Little Earth pointed to a problem that would later be identified as issue number one. Each townhouse unit has two entrances: one door provides access to the living room which is between two and four feet above ground level; and one door leads out of the kitchen at ground level into a courtyard shared by all units in a cluster. It is extremely difficult to tell which of these entrances is the front door and which is the back door. One of the first issues considered by the design teams is the need to clearly identify and personalize the front yard and entry of each unit. Visitors need to have a clear sense of how they should enter a unit when visiting residents of Little Earth. Similarly, each unit's front yard needs to be distinguished from its back yard. Privacy is needed to separate an individual unit's front and backyard from nearby or adjacent community spaces.

All of the designs submitted by the teams fall into one of two categories of resolutions for the frontyard - backyard identity issue: 1) identify front entry as that door leading into each cluster's courtyard (i.e. off the kitchen) with the back door leading from the living room out into the backyard; or 2) place front entry out the living room door and rear entry leading from the kitchen into the courtyard. The proposals made by team one and team two are representative of the general categories into which all the design solutions fall.

Team one designed simple but well defined front entry approaches to each unit that occur on the outside of the cluster. The addition of a back porch on the kitchen side of each townhouse provides more backyard privacy and separates an individual unit's backyard from the adjacent courtyard (See figure 1). The relatively simple plan uses a back porch as a transition area between the public area of the



Figure 1. Photo of team one design proposal showing back porches and front yard to backyard relationship. Photo by Peggy Sand.

courtyard and the private interior of the townhouse. The porch also becomes an ideal place for residents of a unit to sit and watch their children play or to eat a meal without feeling so visible to others.

Team two best typifies the alternative solution. Team two's proposal calls for the front entries to be located on the kitchen side of each unit, on the interior of the cluster. Raised planters are used to extend the entrance to each unit from its door into the courtyard. The planters also provide separation of entry from the adjacent public walks. Backyards for each unit are located on the outside of the cluster. Backyard privacy is provided by creating a fenced patio space near the living room of each house. In addition, the backyards are raised to a height closer to that of the back door. The retaining walls needed to contain the fill will also help to separate the backyard from the public walks. Further separation and screening is accomplished with plants (See figure 2). These backyard patios are safe places for small children to play or for individual families to find peace and quiet. Raising the patios to the height of the living room will give its residents a feeling that a new room has been added to their house.

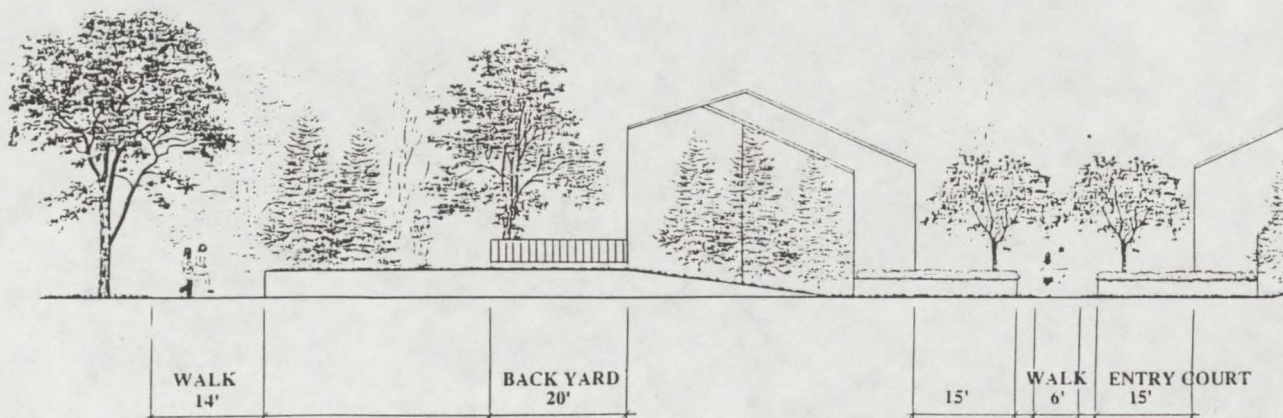


Figure 2. Drawing by team two showing front yard to backyard relationship.

Relationship of Individual Units to Other Units in Their Clusters

The second major issue addressed by the design teams was the relationship of individual units to neighboring units within housing clusters. Design team three worked on the relationship of the two apartment building on the east side of Cedar Avenue to the space between the two buildings. Team three proposes creation of a court in front of each building that will provide a place for apartment residents to gather in small groups. The court is between the front doors of the apartment buildings and a major public walk through the center of the cluster (See figure 3). These courts will enable older residents to feel safe and comfortable watching the world go by without fearing that they will be run over by children or bicycles.

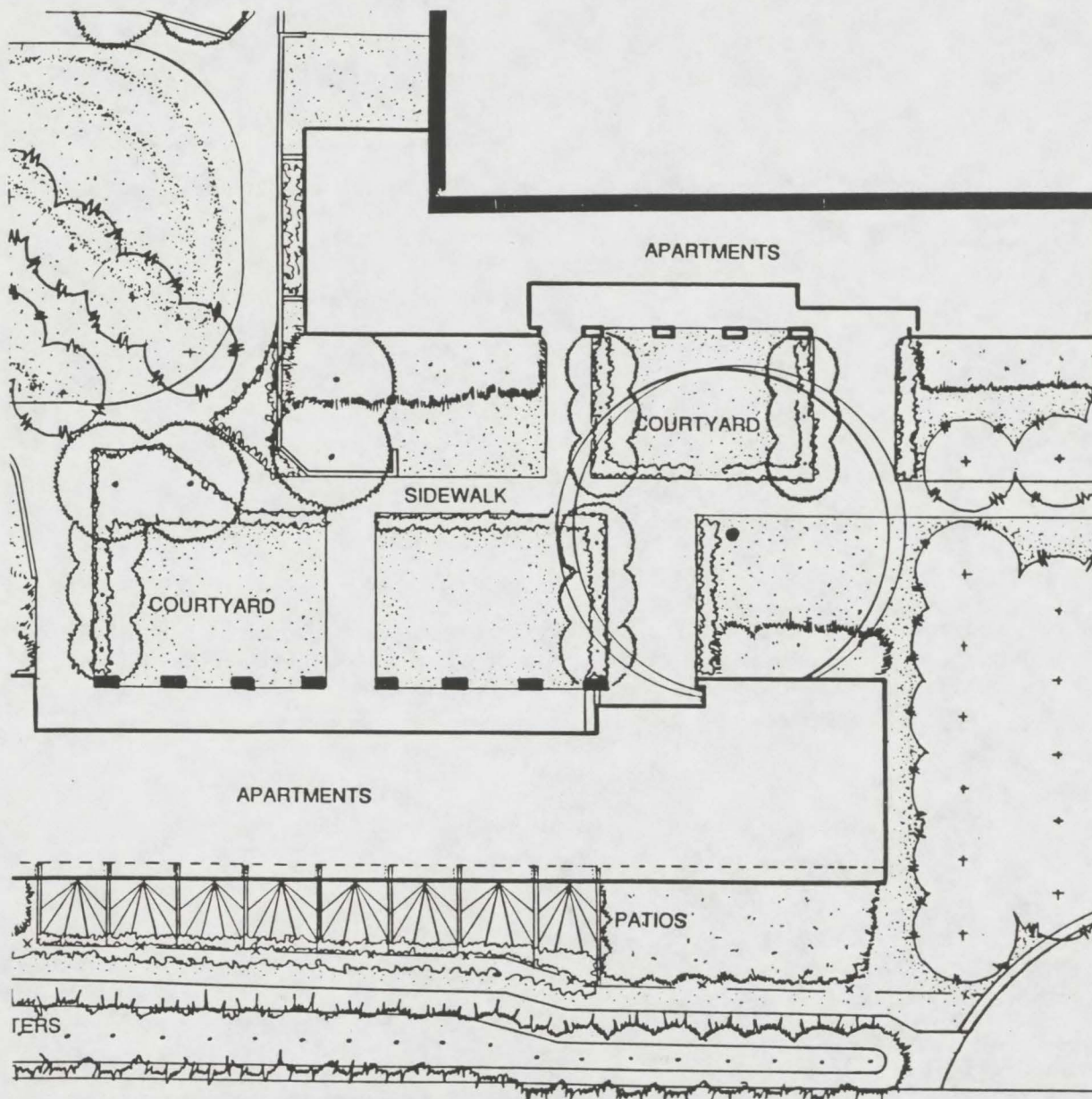


Figure 3. Drawing by team three showing relationship of courtyard to apartment buildings.

Other teams dealt with the relationship of the townhouse units to their respective clusters. Figure 4, drawn by team four, illustrates a proposal to provide residents with a connection from the apartment and townhouse units to open outdoor spaces. Walking paths between buildings would provide the residents with access to an open court containing play equipment, and an open lawn area.

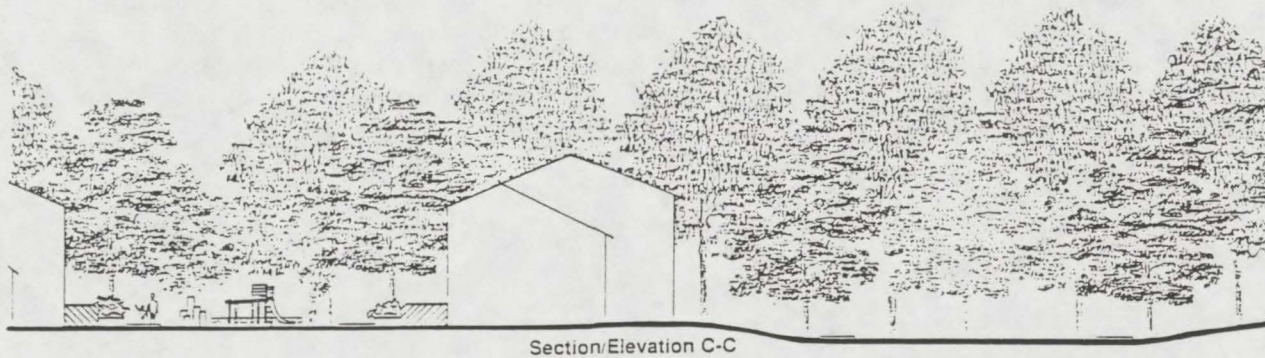


Figure 4. Drawing by team four showing connections between townhouse units and outdoor spaces.

Team five's proposal provides both a large public lawn area and private spaces which connect to the individual townhouse units. The fenced patio areas provide privacy for the residents of the unit while they are seated, but the design also provides a clear view into the public space through the top of the fence when they stand (See figure 5).

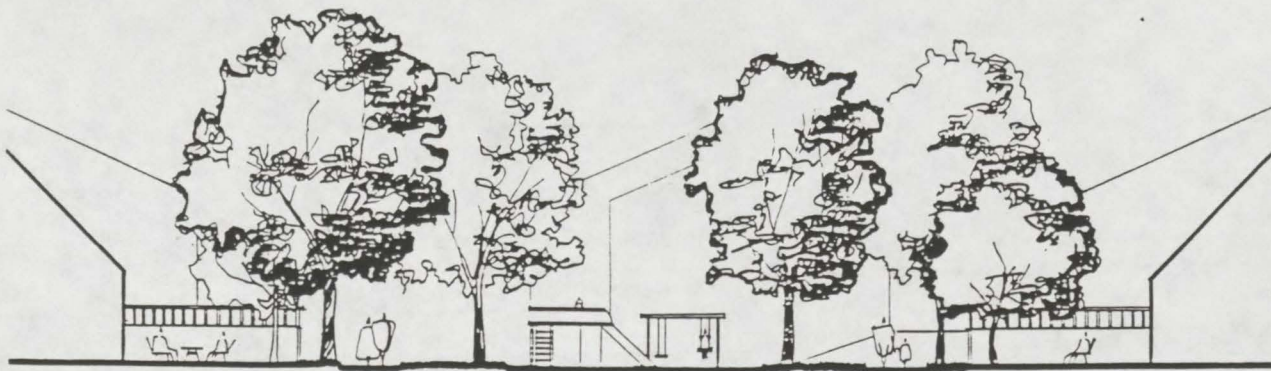


Figure 5. Drawing by team five showing fenced patio areas.

Team one's concept is similar in that it also provides a private space that adjoins a central common space. However team one's concept is different in that residents pass through back porches built onto their units as they walk from the back door to the courtyard. This provides a transition from indoors to outdoors that begins with the privacy of the individual home and ends with the commonly held court area (See figure 1 and figure 6). This indoor - outdoor transition is extended beyond the cluster into the larger community of Little Earth through the use of low walls and gates at the entrance to each cluster's courtyard (See figure 6). The gates created by the low walls welcome visitors to each cluster. They provide an indication that Little Earth belongs to people who care about the place where they live.



Figure 6. Photo of team one design proposal showing walls and gate at cluster entrances. Photo by Peggy Sand.

Design of Shared Community Spaces

Other teams designed shared community spaces where recreation and community activity areas are provided without interfering with the privacy of individual units. Team six designed a semi-circular public lawn area (See figure 7). The proposal allows pedestrian circulation around the outside of the lawn area. While the sidewalk is clearly separated from the open space by trees, the plan does not restrict pedestrian movement and play across the surface of the public space. The lawn provides an open area for families and children to play or lounge on the grass.

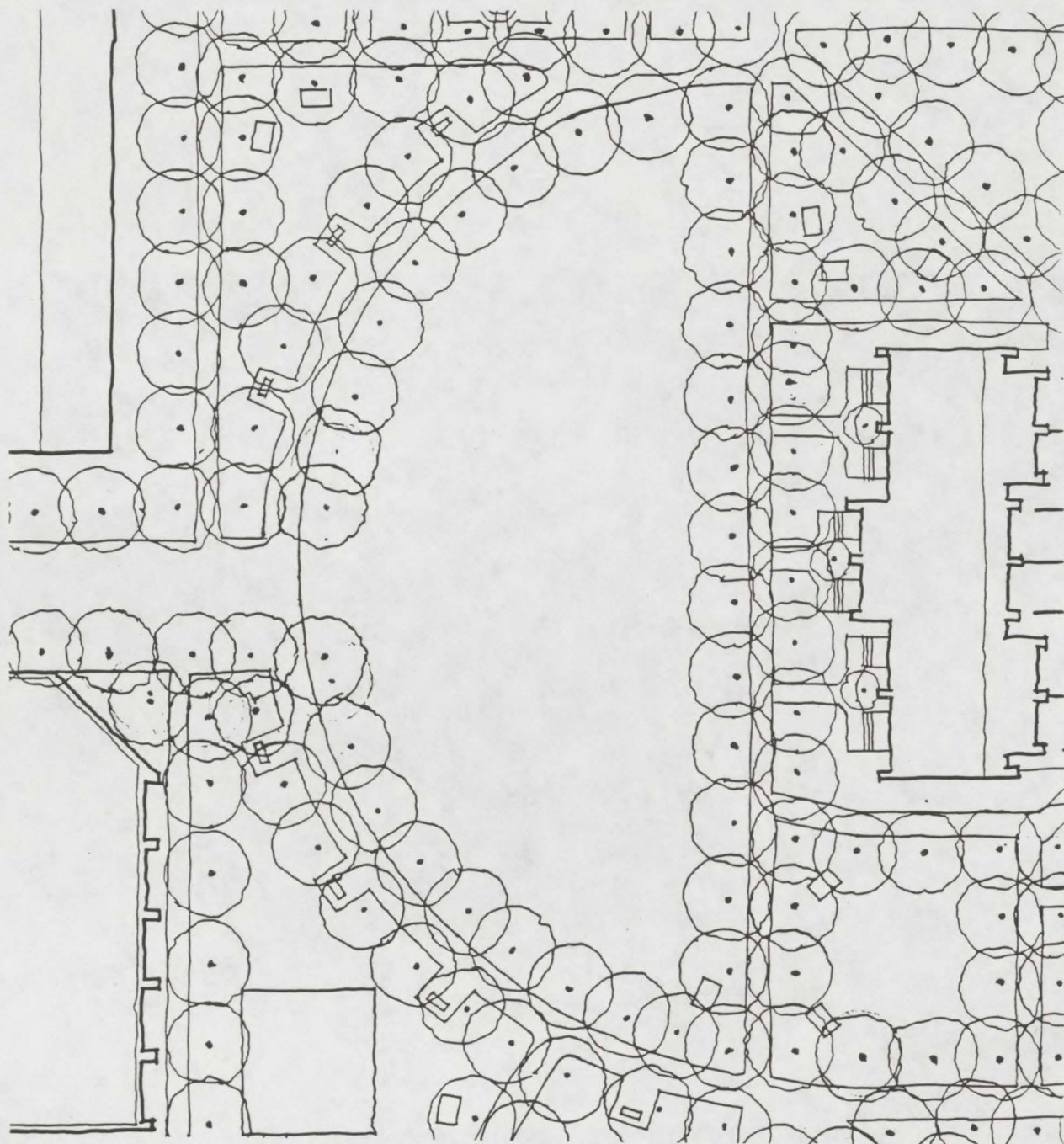


Figure 7. Drawing by team six showing public lawn area.

The design of team seven includes areas for playing horseshoes and basketball in the public space. A series of large central public spaces is separated from the backyards of individual townhouse units with plants. The central public spaces are connected to adjacent cluster courtyards by public walkways (See figure 8).

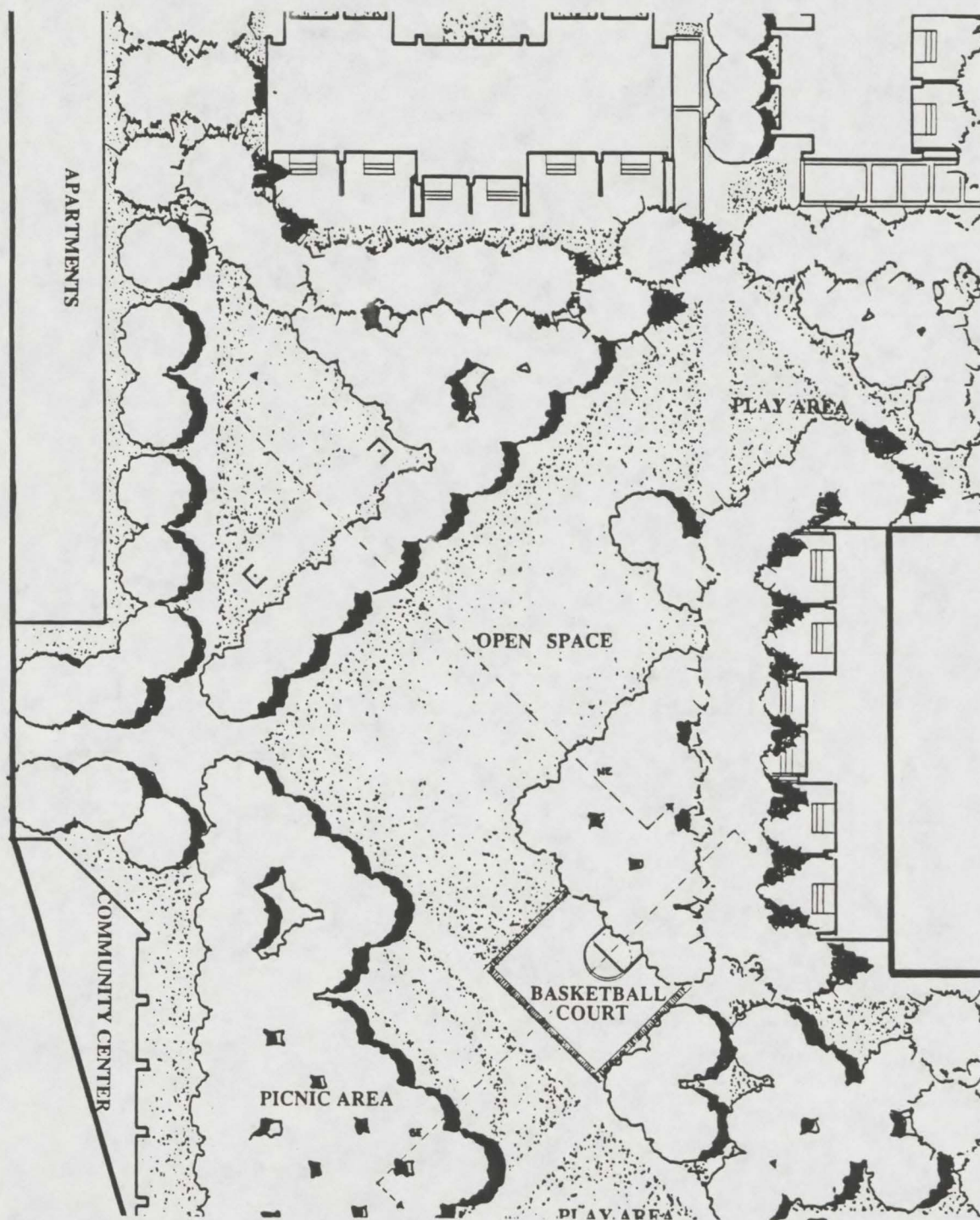


Figure 8. Drawing by team seven showing connection of open space to cluster units.

Team four's proposal provides a large rectangular lawn space with tree shaded walkways along its edges. This quadrangle helps connect the two clusters on the west side of Cedar Avenue (See figure 9).

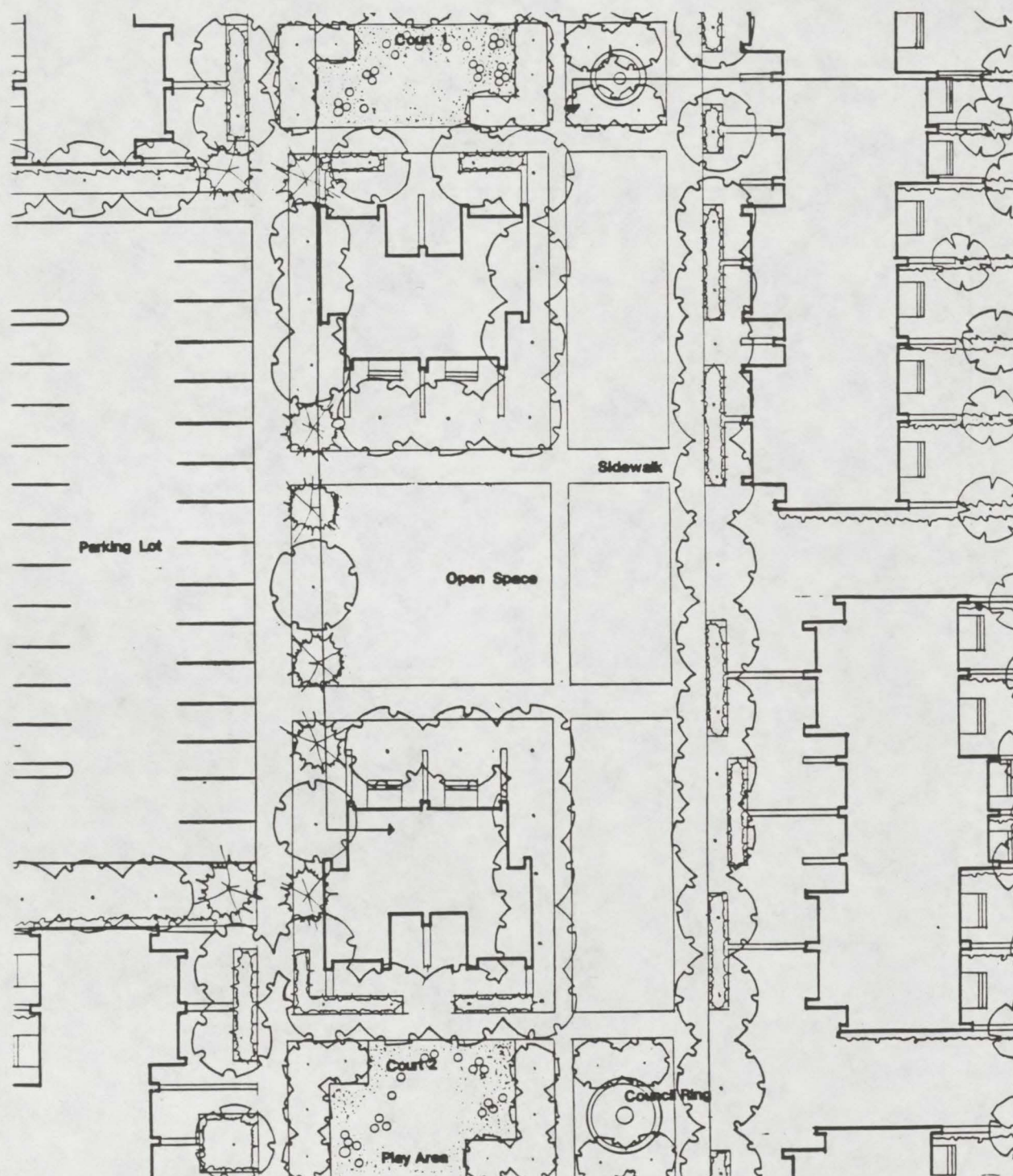


Figure 9. Drawing by team four showing quadrangle connecting two clusters.

The hard surfaced amphitheater / basketball court designed by team five is accessible from several cluster courtyards and also from the main path leading from the community center of Little Earth (See figure 10).

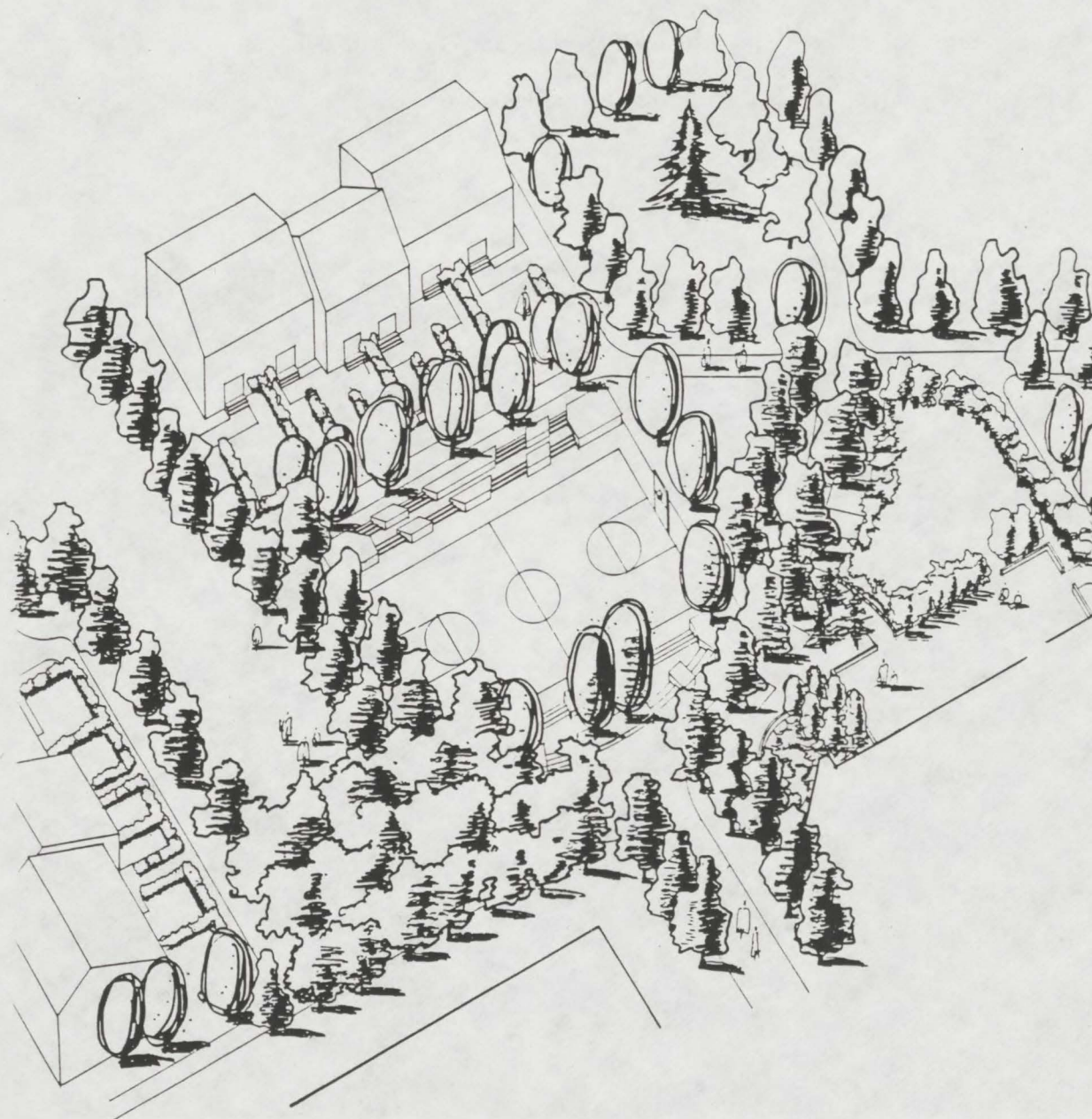


Figure 10. Drawing by team five showing amphitheater / basketball court.

Relationship to Larger Twin Cities Community

The central portion of Little Earth was designed by team eight. At present there exists no strong center to the development. The image that Little Earth presents to the larger community and to those driving on Cedar Avenue is framed by a pedestrian bridge that is in need of repair. The bridge is an awkward link between the easterly and westerly portions of Little Earth that sit on either side of Cedar Avenue. Security problems on the bridge prevent its use by Little Earth residents after dark. Consequently, the bridge presents a pedestrian / vehicular conflict as residents try to cross Cedar Avenue through busy traffic.

The team eight proposal includes elimination of the bridge and creation of an obvious pedestrian crossing of Cedar Avenue (See figure 11). This crossing gives priority back to the pedestrian. The crossing is controlled at the north and south ends by traffic signals and rough-textured paving surfaces

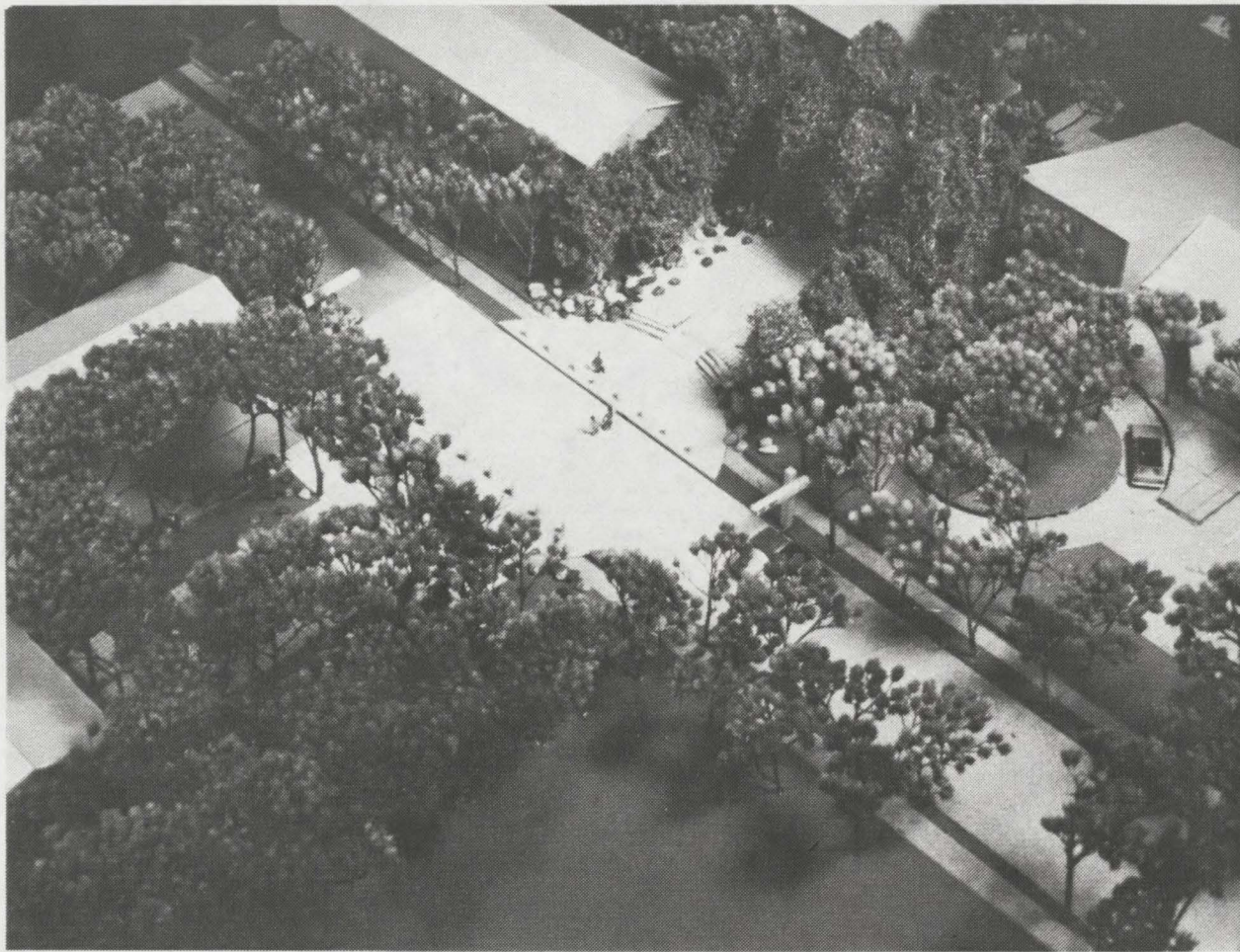


Figure 11. Photo of team eight design proposal showing pedestrian crossing of Cedar Avenue. Photo by Peggy Sand.

to focus driver attention on the crossing. The crossing area is paved with designs created by the residents of Little Earth in order to connect this place with the people who live there and to establish this space as a pedestrian area, in which automobiles are intruders. The creation of this area will project a positive image of Little Earth to the larger Twin Cities community. The paved crossing constitutes an extension of plazas on either side of Cedar Avenue (See figure 12). The plazas contain symbols of Native American culture. They are designed for quiet conversation by small groups of residents as well as gatherings attended by large numbers of residents. The entire plaza area will serve as an entrance to Little Earth. It will create a center of public activities and a place that says the Native American residents of Little Earth and their culture are important dimensions of life in the Twin Cities.

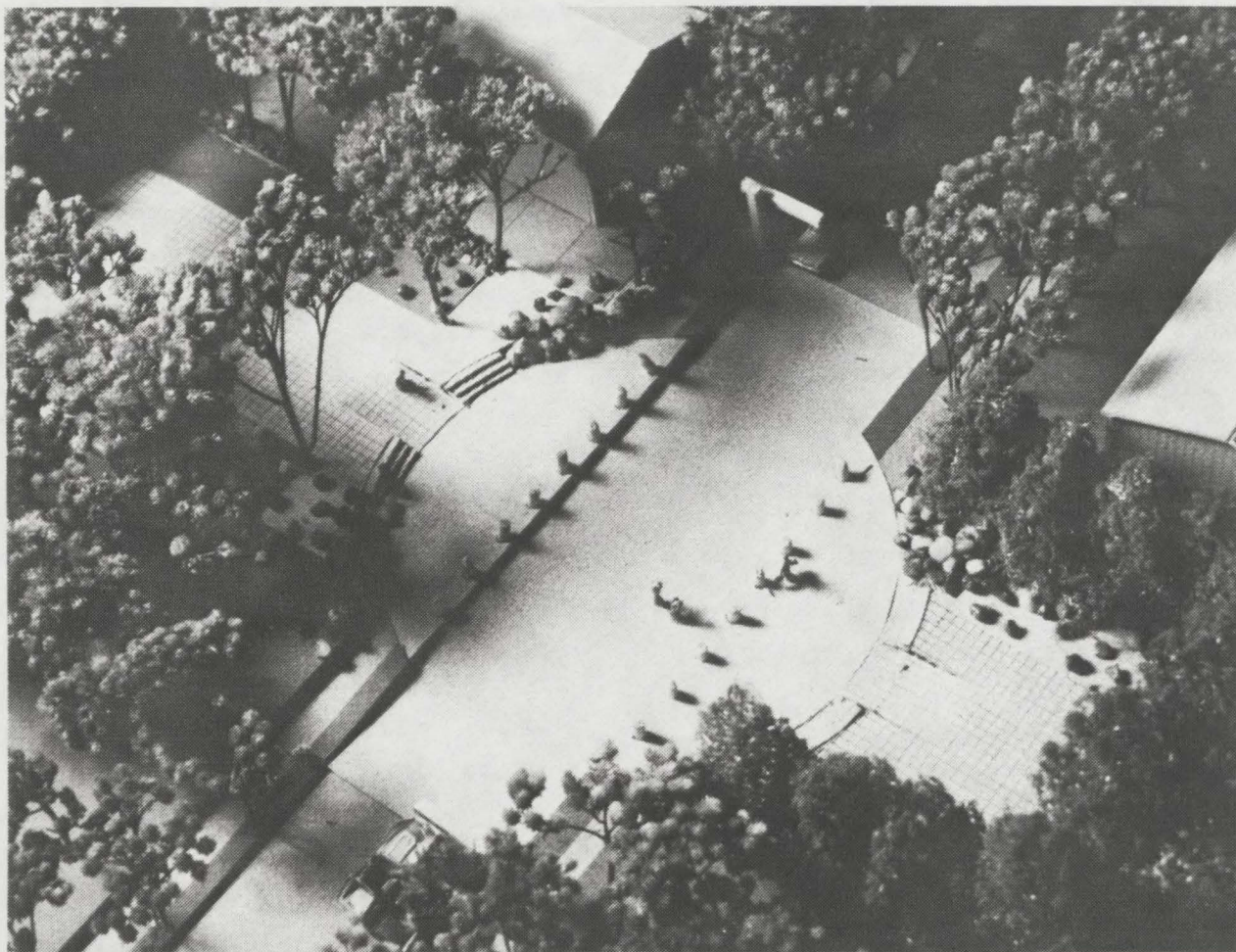


Figure 12. Photo of team eight design proposal showing connection of paved crossing to plazas on both sides of Cedar Avenue. Photo by Peggy Sand.

This booklet is intended to document suggestions for the improvement of exterior spaces at Little Earth. While enabling students to explore in a "real-world" context the issues of community and privacy as they relate to dwelling, the projects summarized in the booklet have produced some concrete suggestions for improving the physical environment of the Little Earth community. Hopefully, the suggestions will serve as a catalyst for change. If nothing else, the community interest sparked in creating the solutions will carry forward as Little Earth residents and the Westminster Corporation continue the process of community improvement.

The student involvement in the Little Earth community planning process points to the necessity of creating a place for the residents that provides them with a sense of their own culture, community identity, and respects the privacy of the individual.